CIA Evaluation of Saddam Was Based on `Community Assessment'

NEW YORK (AP) - CIA chief William Webster says the agency was late in evaluating Saddam Hussein's intention toward Kuwait.

But in an interview to be published Sunday in Parade magazine, Webster disagreed with Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman David Boren's assessment that the agency was still involved in fighting the Cold War and lacks ``sufficient Arabic specialists, linguists.''

Webster, who announced last week his decision to leave the agency, said an assessment was made 10 months before the invasion that Iraq was too exhausted after its eight-year war with Iran to start any new battles.

He said that opinion came not only from the CIA but from the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency, allies in Western Europe, Israel's CIA equivalent the Mossad and intelligence agencies of friendly Islamic nations ``which are not lacking in Arabic linguists.''

Webster said the main problem was that ``Iraq was a total dictatorship - no dissent tolerated. It is very difficult to get into one man's head, to know what he's going to do until he knows it.''

Webster took over as director of the Central Intelligence Agency four years ago and was charged with restoring morale to the agency tarnished by the Iran-Contra affair under predecessor William Casey.

Though still concerned about the image of the agency, Webster said he announced his departure plans at this time ``because we're on high ground. General (Norman) Schwarzkopf said it was the best informed war we ever fought. We're well-positioned for the 90s.''

He denied he was leaving as a result of criticisms or pressures the job carries. ``If I thought that we were under fire, I'd be here at my desk until doomsday.''